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ABSTRACT

This document outlines the nature, present status, and future directions for the teaching of intercultural communication in higher education. Main points covered in the outline include the history of the systematic teaching of intercultural communication, the scope of intercultural communication (for example, interracial or interethnic communication, minority communication and culture, crosscultural communication, or international communication), facts concerning institutions offering and students studying intercultural communication, assumptions on which intercultural communication courses are based, different approaches to such courses, the prospects for these courses in the near future, and suggestions for future directions of intercultural communications courses. (JM)

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FRONTIERS IN COMMUNICATION CURRICULUM:

INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

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Brief Outline

FRONTIERS IN COMMUNICATION CURRICULUM: INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION*

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Purpose: To describe briefly the nature, present status, and future directions for the teaching of intercultural communication in higher education.

Main Points:

1. History: Systematic teaching of courses in the area of intercultural communication began around 1966. Bill Howell at the University of Minnesota, Hideya Kumata at the Michigan State University, Ed Stewart at the University of Delaware, Nobleza Asuncion-Lande at the University of Kansas and Larry Samovar at the San Diego State were among the pioneers in teaching courses in this area.

1.2 Number of courses and programs grew rapidly after 1970 when the ICA recognized the area and created a Division of Intercultural Communication and the SCA created a Commission for International and Intercultural Communication. Also the publication of books like Samovar and Porter(1972), Prosser (1973) and Rich (1974) stimulated rapid growth of the area.

1.3 There are strong indications that the area will continue to grow rapidly in the near future. Bassett and Jeffrey(1975) predict that "like organizational communication, intercultural communication may experience significant growth in the near future" (p. 7).

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*Presnted at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Communication Administration, San Francisco, December 27-30, 1976.

Main Points(Continued):

2. Definition and Scope: Intercultural communication is a broad area. As an area of study, Intercultural Communication is a generic term used to include courses on topics such as:

a. Interracial or interethnic communication

b. Minority communication--communication behaviors, styles, movements of minority racial and ethnic groups

c. Communication and culture--how culture affects communication and how communication affects culture

d. Cross-cultural communication--this term has varied meanings in the literature; commonly used to refer communication between members of different national cultures and to refer to comparative analysis of communication patterns in two or more national cultures.

e. International communication--communication between nations especially through mass media and organizations, especially official and political types of communication; and

f. Communication and modernization, communication and social change, or communication and national development.

2.2 The two most common typologies being used in the area to classify courses, publications, and other professional activities are:

a. Domestic versus international emphasis, and

b. Interaction versus comparative emphasis; this typology is somewhat similar to "culture-general versus culture-specific" typology.

2.3 This diversity of courses or course topics within the area of intercultural communication is reflected clearly in Prosser(1974)--Collection of 55 syllabi in intercultural communication, university catalogues having course descriptions, and many publications in the area.

Main Points(Continued):

3. Present Status of Teaching: A review of [illegible]bi included in Prosser(1974), catalogue descriptions of [illegible]versities which are known to have intercultural communication courses/people, and personal knowledge from professional contacts with intercultural communication professionals reveals following observations concerning the present status of teaching of intercultural communication in higher education institutions:

3.1 Approximately 200 colleges and universities seem to offer one or more courses in intercultural communication.

3.2 Approximately 40 of the above 200 institutions(20%) seem to offer one or more graduate courses in intercultural communication.

3.3 Approximately 10 of the above 200 institutions(5%) seem to offer doctoral level courses and/or areas of specialization (i.e. a sequence of courses) in intercultural communication.

3.4 Approximately 10 of the above 200 institutions(5%) seem to offer a unit on intercultural communication in their popular basic course in communication.

3.5 Institutions offering a single course in intercultural communication seem to include (a) both domestic and international emphases, and (b) both interactional and comparative emphases(or culture-general and culture-specific emphases). This creates some problems and often leads to the creation of more specialized courses--separate courses on domestic and international emphases, for instance.

3.6 Students taking intercultural courses belong to many diverse areas. Usually intercultural courses draw students from:

a. Communication, Journalism or Mass Communication
b. Education(especially Multicultural & International)
c. Social work
d. Nursing
e. Business administration
f. Anthropology, Sociology and Political Science

Main Points(Continued):

4. Assumptions and Approaches: Intercultural communication courses are based on some basic assumptions such as:

   a. Culture is a significant aspect of human civilization.

   b. Individuals, groups and societies have a right to possess, maintain, perpetuate, and enhance their culture. Cultural pluralism is a desirable goal for human civilization.

   c. Individuals, groups, and societies have both cultural similarities and cultural differences. Cultural pluralism allows for both cultural similarities and differences among individuals, groups and societies.

   d. Culture affects and is affected by communication.

   e. Cultural similarities and cultural differences affect the occurence(or non-occurence), nature, and effectiveness of communication among persons with differing cultural or subcultural backgrounds.

   f. It is possible to study cultural characteristics of individuals/groups/societies, cultural influences on communication, and the relationship between cultural similarities and differences on one hand and the communication processes on the other. Intercultural communication area focuses on such a study.

4.2 Intercultural communication courses seem to use one or more of the following three quite different approaches:

   a. Social interaction approach--focus on the effects of cultural traits, cultural similarities, and cultural differences on communication processes;

   b. Cultural group approach--focus on the communication behaviors of a single racial, ethnic, or nationality group and on the comparative analysis of communication patterns of various ethnic or national groups;

   c. Social problems approach--focus on the problems of intercultural relations and what can be done to alleviate such problems, problems such as prejudice, discrimination, assimilation, communication breakdowns, and tensions between racial, ethnic, and national groups.

Main Points(Continued):

5. Future Prospects and Directions:

5.1 Intercultural communication course offerings will continue to grow in the near future. Course enrollments can be increased significantly by the following actions:

a. Incorporation of a unit on intercultural communication in the basic communication course of the department.

b. Publicizing intercultural course offerings to faculty and students in education, social work, business administration, nursing, political science, anthropology, mass communication, and of course, communication.

c. Developing "tracks" or "course sequences" in intercultural communication, at both undergraduate and graduate levels, and "selling" these tracks to students(from various disciplines) who plan to work in interracial, interethnic, intercultural and/or international settings.

5.2 There seems to be a shortage of doctoral graduates who have primary commitment toward teaching and research in intercultural communication. This is evident from the shortage of qualified applicants for intercultural positions at several universities. We need to pay some attention to this problem.

5.3 Intercultural course offerings seem to be growing faster than the body of solid theoretical and research-based knowledge in the area. We need to generate knowledge of a high quality which can be taught in the growing number of courses, especially at the graduate levels. In other words, intercultural communication scholars need to devote more attention to building theories and conducting research than in the past.

5.4 Last but not the least, intercultural communication area need to develop subject matter and curriculum materials which are truely multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, and multi-national in their perspectives. We can not continue to teach intercultural communication courses with mono-cultural knowledge, ethnocentric assumptions, and mono-cultural curricular materials.

In conclusion, we have made good progress in this area in the last ten years or so but we have a long way to go in making intercultural communication an integral part of higher education.

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